

Select ONE of the principles that Froebel built his kindergarten classes upon and apply it to teaching art today. In other words, how does Froebelian philosophy inform contemporary art education practices?

One of the principles that Froebel developed as the foundation of his kindergarten program is self-activity or play. As explained by author Carol Sienkiewicz (1985), “Froebel saw play and the creation of an appropriate environment as the keys to learning for the young child,” (p. 126). As an art teacher in contemporary society I have a very specific vision for the environment of my classroom and that is to create a safe and comfortable environment where students are able to share ideas, perform activities that are new and perhaps out of one’s comfort zone, and creative problem solve with the ultimate goal of developing self-identity and self-confidence...In other words, I create a classroom environment where students are not afraid to try new things on the quest of discovering new things about life and themselves that they were not aware of prior to enrolling in my art classes. Students make discoveries through guided play. I use the word “play” a lot with my students and make a concerted effort to destroy the mind’s fear of failure. When students are encouraged to try new things and “play” connections are made and confidence is developed as students become immersed in the act of experimentation and accomplish personal goals or skills that they had no previous awareness of. As Sienkiewicz states, “touching, feeling, seeing, manipulating, tasting, listening, in fact any method of perceiving and reacting to the environments, is essentially background to the production of art forms, whether on a child’s level or the professional artist’s,” (pg. 130). My high school students lose perspective of how sensory experiences directly correspond to learning and retaining of information and knowledge, and the art education I strive to provide is a reinforcement of lived and sensory human experience as applied knowledge. Self-activity, or play, is essential in the artistic process. As Sienkiewicz reiterates, “...the foundation of the present day art classroom with its rich, stimulating visual environment, developed from the first conception of kindergarten as a place for learning through the senses, for activity in the form of play and for the social, emotional, and cognitive growth of young children,” (pg. 127). From the Froebelian concept of introducing play into the structure and foundation of education, art educators have continued to provide a safe environment where students can develop necessary social, emotional, and cognitive skills through activating the learning experience through the senses. Therefore, the act of guided play offers a holistic learning approach that has remained in art education since its inception in kindergarten classrooms developed by Froebel in the mid-19th Century.